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[100] Civil Society 6, Personal Interview, June 2011, Mannar: Sri Lanka.

[101] Ibid.

[102] There is an extensive debate surrounding the capacity of nationalist movements to address and improve the status of women in society. One set of arguments expects that the inclusion of women in these movements will elevate the status of women in society (Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake "Ambivalent Empowerment: The Tragedy of Tamil Women in Conflict", in Women, War and Peace in South Asia (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001): 105-125). The second deconstructs this expectation, finding that the structurally subordinate position of women in society will lead to gender inequality in the movement (Laboa 1998; Djebar 1992; Coomeraswamy 1988; Schalk 1994). The LTTE, I find, is somewhere in between these two, with elements of their overall ideology that are practical and heavily rooted in reality, and those that are emphasized for instrumental purposes such as recruitment. The counter-militarization process that in itself created vulnerabilities for women is justified as part of a broader intention to improve the security of Tamil women in relation to the state. They also enacted several policies within controlled territories that improved the daily lives of women, leading some women nostalgically to comment: "We women had it good under the LTTE" (Crisis Group 2011).

[103] Credible reports find that the LTTE did use civilians as "human-shields" in the final phases of war. (UN Report 2011).

[104] Anonymous Civilian Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya: Sri Lanka.

[105] A recent interview in Colombo revealed that even peaceful protests by Mothers of The Disappeared in Batticaloa were interrupted by military riot police. Anonymous, Personal Interview, March 2013, Colombo: Sri Lanka.

[106] See an extensive discussion on state militarization in "How Women Rebel: Gender and Agency in Sri Lanka", Gowrinathan, 2012.

[107] Women activists report being called to military headquarters to report on activities, military involvement in the selection of beneficiaries, and military presence at any meeting over five people.

[108] A recent women's meeting in Girithale concluded: "It is important to broaden and strengthen the standard of governing protection and promotion of women's human rights in the post war situation, especially with a society in transition, and to move away from a framework focusing solely on violence and the protection of women. This includes engaging in many ways to focus on political, cultural, and social changes."

Gender Dynamics and Women's Changing Roles in Johannesburg's Somali Community

MARNIE SHAFFER

ABSTRACT

Somali refugees arrived in Johannesburg, South Africa following *apartheid*'s official end in 1994. They have since established a well-organized community in Mayfair, a suburb just west of the city centre, which continues to grow as Somalis migrate to the country in search of peace, security, and livelihood opportunities. Life in South Africa pushes women to adopt new roles and challenge customary gender models while maintaining their household management responsibilities. Several variables shape gender dynamics and contribute to gender negotiations in Mayfair. Shifting family and household structures influence women's changing roles and complicate gender relations as more women, single and married, participate in economic activities and manage their homes and families with limited male support. Customary socio-cultural constructs largely confine women's roles to those performed in the household, but displacement and settlement processes challenge these models and push women into new roles, often with contradictory outcomes. These cultural elements are further complicated by larger South African contexts. Rampant discrimination, abuse, and xenophobic violence against migrants—and Somalis in particular—at the hands of South Africans, law enforcement officers, and state institutions charged with protecting and assisting migrants, invoke fear among Somalis. They increase women's vulnerability, and limit their opportunities as they scrape by with few economic resources. The paradox of women assuming new roles as they are simultaneously limited by the realities of living in South Africa poses important questions about how these contradictions affect gender relations. This article argues that these social and institutional structures are collectively significant to understanding how these complex processes shape refugees' lives and women's roles. It also demonstrates the importance of examining gender relationships within their specific contexts to determine how and why women's roles change and what those differences mean in refugee settlement communities.

Marnie Shaffer, "Gender Dynamics and Women's Changing Roles in Johannesburg's Somali Community," *St Antony's International Review* 9, no. 1 (2013): 33-52.

Introduction

Somalia's protracted conflict and subsequent refugee crisis created a global diaspora that continues to grow in number. With more than one million Somalis living in diaspora, and anywhere between 27,000 and 40,000 residing in South Africa alone,[1] Somali refugees span every corner of the globe but remain heavily concentrated in East Africa. Influxes of Somalis arrived in Johannesburg following *apartheid's* official end in 1994. They have since established a well-organized community in Mayfair, a suburb just west of the city centre, which thrives as Somalis migrate to the country in search of peace, security, and livelihoods. Arriving at different times and bringing their varied experiences with them, members of the Mayfair community face monumental challenges as they negotiate and construct new identities in a country that is often hostile to foreigners. The process of uprooting, migration, and settlement influences changing gender models throughout the diaspora, and the composition of Mayfair Somalis presents an especially important opportunity to explore the ways in which shifting household, family, and community structures in tandem with the larger social, cultural, and political dynamics of South Africa shape gender relations and the construction of women's roles in the country.

Women and men often find themselves in South Africa without the familial and social networks that sustained them in Somalia. One outcome of this transformative process is the importance of women's economic participation as a survival strategy; women may provide much of a household's financial support even when living with a spouse. While women assume new roles to maintain nuclear and extended families, their activities can strain marriages and lead to divorce, a notable pattern observed in other Somali diaspora communities.[2] Furthermore, some members of the community may perceive women's engagement in paid labour as a challenge to the customs that define women's roles as those performed in the house, which leads to accusations of cultural and religious abandonment.

Amongst the most pressing issues in post-*apartheid* South Africa are grinding poverty, high unemployment rates, inadequate housing, and poor service delivery. Pervasive immigration—legal and illegal—invokes xenophobic attitudes and behaviours from citizens who feel migrants, and especially black migrants from around the continent, threaten to take South Africans' already scarce economic opportunities while aggravating the country's high crime rates. These realities have serious implications for Somali women in particular. While emigration from Somalia's patriarchal society to a constitutionally progressive South Africa might intimate empowerment and greater freedom for women,[3] discrimination, crime, and xenophobia hinder women's ability to act on their newly ascribed rights and opportunities outside of Mayfair. Somali socio-cultural constructs and larger social contexts play a critical role in how Somalis understand their position and opportunities in South Africa. This article explores gender dynamics and the intersection of multiple factors that shape gender relations as Somali refugees rebuild their lives in Mayfair.

Situating an Ethnographic Study in Mayfair

Mayfair is home to about eighty-nine per cent of all Somalis who live in Johannesburg,[4] making it the uncontested heart of the Somali community. Based on estimates from community leaders, around 5,000 Somalis live in the Mayfair area. Somalis were initially drawn to this part of Johannesburg, known as the Islamic centre of the city, for the mosques, halal butchers, and Muslim cultural services that South African Indian Muslim communities established. Moreover, its proximity to the city centre was important for developing successful businesses and trading schemes.[5] Somali shopkeepers who work in townships—or settlements outside of the city—often purchase bulk goods in Mayfair which they transport to and sell in their shops. Many of the Somalis who live in Mayfair work and interact within the confines of the area to maximize the use of their networks and employment opportunities.

Mayfair, approximately one square kilometre in area, holds dozens of Somali-owned and operated businesses, including restaurants, clothing shops, small groceries, electronics shops, internet cafés, and guesthouses. Most shops and social activities are situated on 8th Avenue and in the Somali-owned Amal Shopping Centre, where businesses flourish and Somalis spend time shopping and socializing. The Somali community is the largest and most visible ethnic group in Mayfair even as South African Indians and other migrants from around the continent live and trade in the area.

Social and institutional discrimination are an everyday reality for Somalis. Scant social and humanitarian assistance forces refugees to develop livelihood strategies that ensure survival. Moreover, even with legal refugee status, Somalis seldom receive the health, employment, and educational opportunities to which they are entitled. With national unemployment at approximately forty per cent[6] and joblessness in Gauteng Province at more than twenty-six per cent at the time of fieldwork,[7]

Somalis are disadvantaged as they search for financial resources. Therefore, they find alternative niches to develop their livelihoods.

Xenophobic attitudes and hostility toward migrants often lead to violence, and Somalis are frequently victims of robbery and other attacks even as the threat of criminal victimization is a reality for all South Africans.[8] The most abhorrent crime occurs in townships, where primarily male Somali shopkeepers face risks including looting, burning, and homicide. Mayfair residents also confront persistent threats or violations against them, including in their homes. Sixty-five per cent of Somalis in this study have experienced crime — defined as any harmful act against a person or her or his property — by non-Somali nationals in South Africa. Police corruption exacerbates Somalis' insecurity: seventy per cent of the Mayfair population has been subjected to police interrogations, has seen their documents destroyed, or has been forced to pay bribes.[9]

Methodology and Informant Characteristics

The author conducted ethnographic fieldwork between 2010 and 2011 to study Somali gender relations in Mayfair. Over the course of the research period, the author used chain referral selection in tandem with convenience sampling to recruit thirty women and thirty men who participated in three separate interviews—unstructured, narrative, and semi-structured. The interviewees ranged in age from eighteen to forty-seven years. The study elicits data on their experiences as migrants, including the social and institutional barriers they face in South Africa, and on their home, work, and cultural lives prior to migration and in a South African context. Spending the largest part of fieldwork in Mayfair, the author frequently held group interviews with women and men to discuss data, clarify concepts, and elaborate on events in the community. Moreover, focus group interviews provided an engaging forum for debate, covering gendered perspectives on xenophobia, barriers to employment, and changing gender roles and relations in Johannesburg. Collectively these interviews offer insight into cultural constructions and gender conflicts in Mayfair.

All informants were ethnic Somalis but vary in origin. They were born and raised throughout Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, and other African countries. Some never experienced Somalia's civil war directly while others survived the perils of Mogadishu or the hardship of life in refugee camps before settling in South Africa. Their demographic characteristics are variable: informants have divergent educational backgrounds, marital statuses, language abilities, household compositions, migration patterns, and economic strategies. They arrived in South Africa between 1995 and 2010, which is important for understanding some of the conflicting ideologies in the community. Those who settled in the wake of *apartheid*, and before Somalis had established their community in Mayfair, experienced the country's euphoria at *apartheid*'s end and the subsequent disappointment fuelled by extensive social and institutional challenges. The early arrivals skirted violence in Somalia and interacted with other nationals in South Africa. Many learned English, found jobs, befriended non-Somali nationals, such as South African Indian Muslims, and enjoyed their independence. Conversely, more recent arrivals brought their experiences of conflict and war to Mayfair with them. Informants noted distinctions between these two groups: many older migrants perceive newer arrivals as culturally ignorant for never knowing a peaceful Somalia and often attribute many of the community's problems to the newer migrants, who they see as bringing suspicion, violence, and immorality to Mayfair.[10]

The group classified as 'new Somalis' arrived in South Africa between 2004 and 2005 onward. Generally speaking, they are more conservative religiously, reluctant to interact with those outside their community, and unwilling to learn and respect South African laws and social codes of behaviour. The significance of this cultural and ideological blurring is that Somalis find themselves marginalized in broader society and often fragmented in Mayfair. Not only does this confuse the vision of who Somalis are as they form new identities in South Africa, but it has serious implications for women's behaviour, mobility, and opportunities.

Women's Employment and Gender Relations in Settlement: A Review of the Literature

A number of variables shape refugee experiences of loss and exile. These include "structural similarities or dissimilarities between themselves and receiving societies, availability and accessibility of resources and income-generating opportunities, availability and nature of assistance at the initial stage, host government policies and practices, [and] attitudes of nationals towards refugees."[11] These components are collectively important to lived realities in different communities around the world, as are the socio-cultural structures refugees carry with them in settlement. Understanding the gendered dimensions of migration outcomes, changing roles, and power contests must include an examination of situational macro and micro level structures.[12]

Somalis organize their lives around kin and social relations, and they rely upon those networks for support. Women are integral to establishing

new kinship ties through marriage, a route through which the dower contract grants husbands full rights over their wives.[13] This problematizes divorce for women who risk losing their children in the process. Households, therefore, are an important starting point for examining gender relations and the way women and men understand, bargain, and negotiate their rights and responsibilities in marriage.[14] Moreover, larger structures such as families and social networks are critical in shaping and controlling social life, maintaining patriarchal systems, and influencing the construction of gender. For Somalis, these structures include layers of clan and kin relations in Mayfair and often beyond the community.

Empowerment through Economics?

Women's participation in economic activities affords them greater bargaining power in their households, especially if their financial contributions sustain the family. However, a household and national gender perspective is necessary to understand how these constructions may create other challenges. Research on female industrial workers who live in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic shows that paid employment empowers women only when the combination of state policies, access to resources, and household conditions are favourable to them.[15] When a woman's wages serve as a substitute to her husband's, for example, there is little benefit to her overall status. Furthermore, condemnation is a common reaction in cases where women's participation in wage labour is a new development.[16] This contradiction is apparent in Mayfair, where women work for survival resources despite the tension it can create in their households and in the larger community.

Other research shows that once migrant women access the social and economic resources customarily reserved for men, they are empowered to make important decisions and effect change in family gender relations.[17] Women's economic achievements shift power structures in their favour, even as men typically maintain a higher social status.[18] These transformations may grant women more privileges as respected and important players in their communities and afford them more control over personal choices, such as marriage and household decision-making. Using a household and national gender perspective to examine how women's paid employment affects gender relations in Mayfair's Somali community offers insight into how women make financial decisions, what influences their choices, and what effect their activities have on gender relations. It also helps to explain the factors that create conflict and complicate egalitarian gender relations among refugees.

A Somali woman's primary role is that of wife and mother. Conversely, men are economic providers and guarantors of security for their families. Male authority dominates all levels of society — households, families, and communities — and leaves women with limited access to legal rights and leadership roles.[19] While shifting social, economic, and political factors influence changing gender relations and patriarchal behaviours in settlement countries, broad, communal acceptance of these alterations is necessary to sustain them.[20] Despite situational differences in settlement communities, power struggles between women and men are common challenges throughout the Somali diaspora. Measuring how or to what degree migration alters gender relations varies for different populations and depends on cultural contexts and other external forces.

Research on Hutu refugees who live in Tanzania shows that while camp life segregates and restricts refugees' movement, their seclusion enables them to easily exchange information about others in their community.[21] Somalis' social isolation and vulnerability to crime demands the protection and security that Mayfair provides. To receive this assistance, people must demonstrate their membership in the community by maintaining cultural constructs and resisting adoption of South African values and ideologies. Somalis control individual behaviour through the threat of gossip that can damage reputations and impede assistance for those who challenge their social position and stray from acceptable cultural conduct—a risk most women cannot afford.[22]

Findings and Discussion

Somali women who live in South Africa often have few opportunities, little financial support from their families, and the responsibility of leading their households. The paradox is that the Somali cultural context does not encourage women to pursue economic endeavours, even though the reality of women's lives demands their economic participation. In the absence of a husband's (or another relative's) financial contribution, women accept the responsibility to provide for their families locally and abroad despite the increased workload it creates. Women's resourcefulness enables them to navigate their lives in Mayfair as they carve out a livelihood when there are no alternatives, even as physical insecurity leads them to prefer staying in their homes or in Mayfair.

Economically successful women may face resistance from conservative community members and from individuals in their households. This

manifests in various ways, ranging from idle gossip and scolding to domestic violence. Tusmo is a woman in her forties who moved to South Africa in 1997 and her experiences illustrate the conflict between cultural customs and survival demands. Her husband quit his job in a shop several years ago and decided to stop working entirely. Tusmo sustained her husband and children by selling homemade sweets around Mayfair, and eventually sold vegetables, clothing, perfume, and jewellery in the same way. She also rented out rooms in her home to earn extra income to feed her family and put her children through school. As time passed, Tusmo's husband became abusive and beat her regularly, which she could not explain even as she noted his anger when she left the house to perform her jobs. He wanted her to stay home all day and did not think she should work, but Tusmo had no choice and became the family's breadwinner. Tusmo responded to financial demands proactively, and her husband responded to her power with violence.[23]

Employment and Gender Relations

Women who need economic resources leave Mayfair and assume the associated risks only when their position requires it. Employment, for the most part, is a survival strategy that is intimately tied to life and interaction within the Somali community. Farhiya, for example, is a divorced woman with four children to support. Without a husband's financial resources, she has created several income-generating strategies to make ends meet. These include jobs that oblige her to leave Mayfair. When asked why she chose her trade, Farhiya stated, "It's to survive the life." Without start-up money to open a shop in Mayfair, Farhiya performs any number of informal jobs to buy food for her family.[24] Women in need of an income use their skills to develop self-employment strategies, such as cooking food for weddings or to sell in shops. This partially results from the availability of positions and scheduling work around children, but it can also involve the strength of networks as they relate to kin and clan. Even close friendships formed in South Africa do not guarantee jobs for women. This means that knowing someone's background or family in Somalia and sharing a clan identity are crucial to securing employment. Furthermore, jobs in local shops are scarce: while Mayfair is home to a thriving Somali community, employment options are limited.

The question of whether or not women's economic participation changes gender relations evoked interesting responses. Women have jobs because their family's livelihood—in South Africa and in Somalia—depends on it. In Somalia, women were not under pressure to provide financial support to their natal kin. This has changed in South Africa as these women now feel responsible for supporting their close kin abroad.[25] With better economic opportunities—or rather, greater potential to create economic strategies as financial demands grow—single and married women are likely to generate monetary resources when their households and extended families necessitate it.

Most women feel their economic activities have little to do with gender relations in Mayfair; work is for survival and not for advancing women's social position. Men have the perception that women who earn an income do not need them and believe money grants women freedom from dependence on men.[26] This contradiction creates conflict between spouses. One man said, "Women aren't waiting for their husband's hand. This is why women aren't listening to their husbands. Before, a woman was under the man and didn't talk too much, but now women have their own money and can do whatever they want."[27] Regardless of how individuals feel, the significance of this change is women's financial obligation to the family. Women now contribute to household economics in ways that were once solely men's responsibility.

The women of Mayfair feel that the way men respond to their economic participation causes gender relations to shift, not the act of working itself. As one woman stated: "Only men believe women bring problems when they work. Men think women think they don't need them. Men think women can do whatever they want when they're working."[28] While men perceive women's economic success as a rejection of them as providers and partners, women view it as a subsistence strategy only and they crave strong partnerships built on love and support. The women explained that men's objection to their economic participation is rooted in customary gender roles that confine them to households. Activities beyond the domestic sphere require consultation with husbands.[29] When men lost their livelihoods in Somalia, close kin offered compensation. Women assume this role in South Africa and play a larger role in their families' financial maintenance even though women and men generally believe that women should stay home if their husbands can provide adequate support.[30]

Somali Socio-cultural Contexts

Somali culture remains deeply patriarchal despite deviations caused by protracted conflict and migration. Survival strategies, shifting household dynamics, and exposure to new cultural and legal systems challenge these structures, effecting some degree of change. Women's new economic roles position them as family leaders in the diaspora and in Somalia, yet patriarchy manifests itself by the way families, and Somalis generally, regard

female development as members in society. Even with women's changing roles and reconstituted gender relations, men remain the expected household leaders. This view is problematic in South Africa as men struggle to succeed when faced with demanding and dangerous work prospects.

One of the challenges for women as they balance their cultural lives with their social and economic realities is how Islamic proscriptions should factor into the choices they make. Informants noted more rules and greater religious restrictions for women — on where they go and what they do — that limit and control their movement in Mayfair. Several women commented that men in particular discourage women from pursuing paid employment. They argue that men want to maintain control while women remain vulnerable and use Islam to support their position regarding women's place and roles in society.[31] Men acknowledge the contradictory nature of this problem. As one informant said: "Religion says that women don't work and men do; women must be in the house. In South Africa, women have the freedom to work and the laws aren't dictated by religion."[32] For the most part, however, it appears that women challenge their gender roles only when faced with few choices. Despite their economic need, women who defy customary gender models often confront criticism from those in the community who feel women should remain in the home at all costs, with or without financial hardship, and leave support provisions to men.[33]

Families and Households

Women strongly identify with activities performed in the domestic sphere—caretaking, cooking, cleaning, and washing—and value their responsibility to support, educate, and care for children. Women lead their households in that they maintain them, but few women self-identify as household leaders, defined as managing the home, determining how money is spent, and making important decisions about housing and household composition.[34] Women's economic contributions do not always lead to a leadership role within the household; rather, leadership is often determined by ideological views that vary from one household member to the next. For example, Dalmar and Amina married in the mid-2000s and have three children together. Amina believes she is the household leader since she is in charge of daily operations, decides who lives in their home, and manages the household budget.[35] Conversely, Dalmar feels he is the leader as mandated by Islam and because he is the primary financial provider to the household.[36] Spousal power dynamics differ from family to family, but Dalmar and Amina's case demonstrates how individuals in a couple often interpret their position in marriage differently. Gender arrangements and different perceptions of leadership in relationships are indicative of larger social contexts, power constructions, and inequalities that shape social order and exclude women from leadership roles in the broader community.

Conflict and Outcomes

Marital problems are frequently about resources: increased financial stress and heightened spousal expectations are primary reasons for many divorces in Mayfair. Informants argue that it is an issue of control. Halima, for example, assigns blame to men: "Some husbands want their wives to stay home but they [men] are not providing for the family. The women find it intolerable and this leads to fighting and divorce. If a wife works and the husband doesn't, the husband still wants to control the money and be the boss."[37] Conversely, Mohamed faults women for marital breakdowns: "Women think they were in jail in Somalia and came out with a free life. Women now think they should work as a man. It's not okay to work if they have children because they [working women] cause problems."[38] Men think life in South Africa instils in women ideas about earning their own money, which leads to spousal conflict. Men controlled the activities and movements of women before the Somali war, when women were mostly housewives who complied with cultural gender arrangements. Now there are female breadwinners who, from men's perspectives, demand quite a lot from their husbands and want to lead their relationships.

Despite women's ability to develop livelihood strategies, their limited opportunities make it more likely that they will remain in unsuccessful marriages for the sake of survival and for fear of losing their children and resources should they pursue a divorce. A recently divorced mother of four, Fardowsa, attributes this problem to the absence of extended family members in Mayfair who would protect women against a husband's poor behaviour and provide for her in the event of divorce.[39] Uncertain about their earning potential, women are financially unable or unwilling to live independently without a spouse. If a divorced woman has several children and needs a husband to provide financial support, her marriage prospects are limited.[40]

South African Dynamics

Most Somali women live and interact within the confines of Mayfair, where community solidarity provides them with a sense of protection. Women are especially vulnerable to discrimination for their phenotypic features and Islamic dress that mark them as foreigners. They fear fall-

ing victim to rape, robbery, and harassment if they venture far from the safety of Mayfair. Not only does this limit integration into larger South African society, it also reduces women's economic opportunities. Women's insecurity is rooted in the pervasive social and institutional barriers that restrict their movement, and their economic choices reflect anxiety about interacting outside the community. Understanding these barriers is central to unpacking community dynamics in Mayfair, as uncertain livelihoods and unequal protection from harm force all Somalis to rely on one another for economic support and physical safety. These factors play a vital role in the way gender relations function among members of the Mayfair community.

Government Support and Social Services

The South African government's scant financial and social investment in refugee populations drives individuals to settle in urban centres, such as Johannesburg.[41] It compels someone like Qani, a divorced, uneducated woman of about forty who arrived in South Africa alone, does not speak English, and has few marketable skills, to wholly depend on the Somali community for financial resources.[42] In the absence of social services to support settlement, such as providing orientation, language classes, tertiary education, and job skills training, Somalis cannot fully realize their economic potential nor can they interact more successfully with native South Africans and integrate into broader society.

The lack of priority afforded non-nationals exacerbates discrimination against them and contradicts the state's commitment to ensuring their basic rights, such as health care and free primary education for children.[43] Somalis face discrimination not only from South African citizens, but also from the state, which fails to provide protection and assistance, and from the police who routinely harass and demand bribes from Somalis in Mayfair. This serves to further marginalize Somalis, ensure their distinction as a foreign group, and force them—women in particular—to live together and depend on one another for security, protection, and opportunities.[44]

Xenophobia and Discrimination

South Africa's propensity toward xenophobia distinguishes the country as one of the most hostile environments for foreign migrants in the world and for black Africans in particular.[45] The fear of xenophobic attacks affects Somali women's activities and mobility, often rendering them afraid to leave their homes. Women noted their anxiety about walking down the street even in Mayfair for fear of being attacked in broad daylight. Moreover, some women reported harassment by non-Somali neighbours who tell them to leave South Africa because they make the country dirty.[46] One woman spoke of her terror when South Africans walk by her house and shout: "We're going to start the xenophobia soon. We don't want you here. We're going to kill you."[47] Such verbal threats affect women deeply and ensure they limit their movement in the city. Even with the perils in Mayfair, women prefer the relative security their community provides and leave for work only when economic hardship necessitates it.

While men share women's safety concerns, they are more willing to accept risks by working outside of Mayfair. Men often work in townships despite the threats of robbery, looting, and physical violence, enticed by lucrative business opportunities. Most women avoid work in townships because the risk of rape poses insurmountable safety concerns which make the prospect of securing a livelihood there too dangerous for women to consider seriously.[48] Several people illustrated this threat by relaying the story of a Somali woman who lived with her three children in Queenstown, a township near Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape. They were murdered in 2008 and the mother was stabbed 113 times, but not before she and her daughter were gang raped.[49] While many Somali deaths in townships are not widely reported, the United Nations Human Rights Commission investigated this especially vicious assault.[50] Members of the Mayfair community know these stories of victimization in townships and claim that the threat of rape limits Somali women's economic activities to those they can perform locally.

A Conflict of Cultures: Exercising Somali Women's Rights in South Africa

Most Somalis assume that South Africa's constitution secures greater rights for women, even though it outlines measures for equality only, and that courts favour women in domestic affairs. Questions about women's rights evoked various responses from women and men about how much power Somali women hold in the country. Women who adopt South African culture, or at least adhere more to the country's ideologies and laws than to Somali customs, have and exert their autonomy but are perceived as anti-Somali, or as going against the culture. As one woman stated: "Those Somalis who don't respect their culture do what they want. Somalis who do respect their culture are limited in what they can do."[51] Most women uphold their culture and have positive reputations in Mayfair, yet they hold less power as a consequence. It is critically

important that women maintain good standing in their community so that they may receive social and financial resources when other survival strategies fail. It is difficult to secure community assistance if members believe women have abandoned their cultural principles. Women must choose their battles carefully and decide for themselves whether they want to exercise their new rights or conform to Somali laws and customs. With widespread physical and economic insecurity, most women cannot gamble their position in society.

Batuulo's case demonstrates the challenges women face as they navigate their lives and new roles in Mayfair.[52] Batuulo is an exceptionally strong woman who follows Somali custom over South African law. When the author met her, she was the family breadwinner and household leader. Her husband did not work, offered no material or emotional support to his family, and Batuulo suspected infidelity. Her achievement as an entrepreneur afforded her tremendous power in her home and, to a lesser extent, in the community. People turned to her for material and financial assistance as well as conflict mediation. Despite Batuulo's value among Somalis, her husband beat her and refused to grant the divorce she so desperately wanted, threatening to take her children and her business should she leave him. This effectively trapped her in the marriage. Both extended families, along with community members, worked tirelessly to persuade Batuulo to reconsider her position. Even with her success, Somali society still regarded her husband as the head of the family. Batuulo intimated that divorce would come with a settlement—surrendering her business and having her male kin pay her husband to divorce her.

Batuulo frequently discussed her marital woes. When asked how she balances Somali customs with her rights in South Africa, she said,

> I have two hands. On one hand is our culture and religion. I am begging [my husband] for a divorce because he is the father of our children. I have tried to talk to him about it, but nothing. If things don't work behind the door, I'll go to Islamic organizations for assistance. On the other hand is my last option, and that is to take him to court, and I know the South African court will side with me.[53]

It was not until Batuulo finally went to the police after her husband threatened to kill her that he granted her plea for a divorce. Their families, community members, and Somali elders all reluctantly agreed that the couple could not resolve their differences. As most women in similar situations do, Batuulo turned to the police only as a last resort. She felt that no one in the community listened to her problems and such a drastic measure was the only option left for her to achieve the outcome she desired.

In a focus group interview, women spoke of their dreams to build meaningful careers but feel they are unattainable in South Africa.[54] They want to learn new skills and perform jobs that enrich their lives, but instead their reality largely confines them to what they can achieve in their community. While South Africa grants all women the freedom to do as they please, Somali women do not feel that this privilege applies to them. Women who want change find it difficult to push forward as long as they lack support from the community, and these challenges frustrate them. They also recognize that South Africa is a dangerous place for women, that their actions come with risks, and that they need the protection Mayfair provides. Women explained this contradiction as manipulation, and argued that the problem is about Somalis, mostly men, who attempt to control women in South Africa. There is more freedom for women to pursue new roles and opportunities, but men try harder to maintain control in the name of culture and religion. From some women's perspective, men use women's insecurity in the country as an excuse to control them, even though men ultimately are powerless to control anyone.

The concept of gender equality has penetrated the community and modified some customary distinctions between women and men, but it appears that little has changed in practice. This is central to understanding how conflict and contradictions challenge gender relations in Mayfair. Push and pull factors empower and disempower women who often lack the close kinship networks that would protect them in Somalia. At the same time, those absent networks grant women more autonomy in their personal lives. Women accept their new roles and responsibilities but feel they must operate within a cultural system that resists change in a world where change is the only way to survive. Women are granted more power, but exercising that power might threaten their livelihood prospects. A woman who uses resources outside of the community to achieve her ends will be hard-pressed to secure community support and find a man willing to marry her as she may be perceived as likely to cause him trouble later. If women are powerless in Mayfair, it is because they cannot escape the mechanisms of social control within the community they rely upon for protection and support.

Conclusion

This paper argues that social and institutional structures collectively shape refugee lives, gender relationships, and women's roles. It shows how access to resources and competition over power play out in Mayfair while demonstrating the contradictory nature of this process. The

economic realities of South African life challenge gender relations and lead Somali women to forgo customary gender distinctions in favour of pursuing survival strategies in the absence of financial provisions from men. Somalis hold little power as refugees in South Africa, but women have proven their ability to overcome economic barriers when they must and manage to access resources when there are no alternatives. The ensuing gender contests demonstrate men's difficulty in accepting women's labour participation, which sometimes manifests in physical violence against women. Men often find women's economic empowerment and their own disempowerment problematic, as they have lost control over financial resources and their ability to control women's roles and behaviour. As gender relations undergo negotiations in Mayfair, women's economic activities will continue to serve as reminders of shifting power structures in the community and beyond.

Migration can provide an opening for women to pursue new roles and challenge subordinating customs. While reconstituted gender relations might entail greater freedom for women, other important factors can impede the degree to which change occurs. Economically active women in Mayfair, single and married, work only when household dynamics demand it. However, this is a survival strategy that may not secure women's empowerment. Conditions in South Africa also hinder this process: while South African laws grant refugees rights, such as the right to employment, entitlements are not implemented and enforced at social and institutional levels. Crime and discrimination exacerbate the effects of failed state policies and few employment options for women, along with Somali cultural contexts that pose yet additional challenges to women whose primary goal is to provide for their families. These realities have serious implications for Somalis, particularly for women whose fear of xenophobia confines them to Mayfair. Physical and economic insecurity draw women and men to live in a community where they feel their networks and ethnic kin support and protect them. Women thus find it difficult to challenge their social position and effect meaningful change in their lives because of their limited mobility and pressing social and economic needs.

Despite the colossal barriers that limit women's ability to contest gender norms in Mayfair, similar power struggles exist in Somalia and in other Somali diaspora communities as women assume new economic responsibilities. This suggests that Somalis are conflicted about the ways in which their culture is changing as they form new identities at home and abroad. It appears that broader social and institutional contexts influence the rate of change and may explain why transformation is uneven in different communities. If gender relations are to shift in a direction that favours women and establishes egalitarian relationships, Somalis must accept women's changing roles as a positive outcome for households, families, and larger society. ■

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Notes

[1] Zaheera Jinnah, "Making Home in a Hostile Land: Understanding Somali Identity, Integration, Livelihood and Risks in Johannesburg," *Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 1, no. 1-2 (2010): 91-99.

[2] See for example Rima Berns-McGown, *Muslims in the Diaspora: The Somali Communities of London and Toronto* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

[3] Defined as new possibilities for achievement in areas from which women were previously excluded. See Sarah Mosedale, "Assessing Women's Empowerment: Towards a Conceptual Framework," *Journal of International Development* 17 (2005): 243-257, 252.

[4] Forced Migration Studies Programme (FMSP), "Migration and the New African City: Citizenship, Transit, and Transnationalism – Descriptive Statistics-Johannesburg," (Johannesburg: FMSP, 2006).

[5] Jinnah, "Making Home in a Hostile Land."

[6] Stephen Ellis, "Introduction: Migration in Post-Apartheid South Africa," in *Migration in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Challenges and Questions to Policy-Makers*, eds. Aurelia Wa Kabwe-Segatti and Loren Landau (Paris: Agence Française de Développement, 2008), 47-53, 48.

[7] Statistics South Africa, "Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Quarter 4, 2010" (Pretoria: Statistics South Africa, 2011).

[8] Loren B. Landau, "Decentralization, Migration, and Development in South Africa's Primary Cities," in *Migration in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Challenges and Questions to Policy-Makers*, eds. Aurelia Wa Kabwe-Segatti and Loren Landau (Paris: Agence Française de Développement, 2008), 163-211 and Jean Pierre Misago, Loren B. Landau, and Tamlyn Monson Monson, *Towards Tolerance, Law, and Dignity: Addressing Violence against Foreign Nationals in South Africa* (International Organization for Migration (IOM), Regional Office for Southern Africa, 2009).

[9] Loren Landau, "Decentralization, Migration, and Development in South Africa's Primary Cities," Agence Française de Développement (2008).

[10] The author questioned interviewees about variation within the Mayfair community. One recurring theme during individual interviews was the distinction between older and more recent arrivals.

[11] Gaim Kibreab, "Refugeehood, Loss and Social Change: Eritrean Refugees and Returnees," in *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies: Agency, Policies, Ethics and Politics*, eds. Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks, and Joke Schrijvers (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004), 19-30, 21.

[12] Cathy McIlwaine, "Migrant Machismos: Exploring Gender Ideologies and Practices among Latin American Migrants in London from a Multi-Scalar Perspective," Gender, *Place and Culture* 17, no. 3 (2010): 281-300.

[13] Ioan M. Lewis, *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somali Society (Lawrenceville*, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1994), 42.

[14] Henrietta L. Moore, *A Passion for Difference: Essays in Anthropology and Gender.* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994).

[15] Helen Safa, *The Myth of the Male Breadwinner: Women and Industrialization in the Caribbean* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).

[16] Mary Mills, "Gender and Inequality in the Global Labor Force," Annual Review of Anthropology 32 (2003): 41-62.

[17] ibid.

[18] Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

[19] Judith Gardner and Amina Mohamoud Warsame, "Women, Clan Identity and Peace-building," in *Somalia - The Untold Story: The War Through the Eyes of Somali Women*, eds. Judith Gardner and Judy El Bushra (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 153-165.

[20] Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, "Between Victim and Agent: Women's Ambivalent Empowerment in Displacement," in *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies: Agency, Policies, Ethics and Politics*, eds. Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks, and Joke Schrijvers (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004), 151-63.

[21] Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[22] This topic arose during several individual interviews with the author. It was discussed during separate focus group interviews with women, January 3, 2011, and men, January 4, 2011, and debated during a mixed gender focus group interview, January 7, 2011, all with author, Mayfair.

[23] Interviews with author, Mayfair restaurant, May 1, 2010 and December 9, 2010. Note that pseudonyms are used throughout the paper.

[24] Forty-four-year-old woman, interview with author, Mayfair home, July 3, 2010.

[25] Twenty-six of thirty female informants feel responsible to send remittances. In a women's focus group interview, January 3, 2011, participants noted the importance of remitting to help their families and rebuild their country.

[26] These issues were discussed at length during separate focus group interviews with women, January 3, 2011, and men, January 4, 2011, and debated during mixed gender focus group interviews, January 7, 2011 and January 11, 2011, all with author, Mayfair. Focus group questions developed from data collected during individual interviews and through participant observation.

[27] Forty-year-old divorced man, men's focus group interview with author, Mayfair guesthouse, January 4, 2011.

[28] Twenty-year-old married woman, interview with author, Mayfair home, October 9, 2010.

[29] Women's focus group interview with author, Mayfair, January 3, 2011.

[30] This issue was discussed during separate focus group interviews with women, January 3, 2011, and men, January 4, 2011, and during mixed gender focus group interviews, January 7, 2011 and January 11, 2011, all with author, Mayfair.

[31] Women and men debated this point during a mixed gender focus group interview with author, Mayfair, January 7, 2011. Men argued that Islam establishes men's role as family provider, to which a thirty-six-year-old married woman responded, "Men made the rule that women stay at home."

[32] Thirty-one-year-old married man, interview with author, Mayfair guesthouse, October 14, 2010.

[33] This issue was discussed during separate focus group interviews with women, January 3, 2011, and men, January 4, 2011, and during mixed gender focus group interviews, January 7, 2011 and January 11, 2011, all with author, Mayfair.

[34] Ten female informants self-identify as household leaders, though families living in sublet rooms may account for some lack of women's household leadership. The financial strain of life in South Africa often culminates in multiple family households regardless of family composition.

[35] Twenty-eight-year-old woman, interview with author, Mayfair home, July 28, 2010.

[36] Forty-four-year-old man, interview with author, Mayfair restaurant, July 26, 2010.

[37] Thirty-eight-year-old divorced woman, interview with author, Mayfair home, July 3, 2010.

[38] Thirty-four-year-old married man, interview with author, Mayfair guesthouse, June 25, 2010.

[39] Twenty-five-year-old woman, interview with author, Mayfair home, October 1, 2010. At the time of interview, Fardowsa struggled to support her children but felt

divorce was her best option, noting her former husband's abusive behaviour.

[40] This was a recurring theme during individual interviews and daily conversations, and an important topic during a women's focus group interview, Mayfair, January 3, 2011.

[41] Karen Jacobsen, "Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Urban Areas: A Livelihoods Perspective," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19, no. 3 (2006): 273-86.

[42] Interviews with author, Mayfair guesthouse, November 29, 2010 and November 30, 2010.

[43] Landau, "Decentralization, Migration, and Development in South Africa's Primary Cities."

[44] Samadia Sadouni, "'God is not Unemployed': Journeys of Somali Refugees in Johannesburg," *African Studies* 68, no. 2 (2009): 235-49.

[45] Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse and the Postcolonial State," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (2001): 627-51.

[46] Women discussed the insecurity they feel during individual interviews and daily interactions, and it was an important topic during a women's focus group interview, Mayfair, January 3, 2011.

[47] Twenty-five-year-old married woman, interview with author, Mayfair home, July 15, 2010.

[48] Somali Association of South Africa representative, interview with author, Mayfair, February 13, 2010.

[49] Mavis Makuni, "Africa: SA Killings Underscore Refugees' Plight," *Financial Gazette*, October 11, 2008.

[50] IRIN, "Somalia-South Africa: Foreign Competitors Not Welcome," IRIN, October 17, 2008.

[51] Twenty-nine-year-old divorced woman, interview with author, Mayfair shop, September 22, 2010.

[52] Thirty-six-year-old female business owner in Mayfair with whom the author interviewed but also interacted on a daily basis.

[53] Interview with author, Mayfair home, December 20, 2010.

[54] Women's focus group interview with author, Mayfair, January 3, 2011. This discussion was in response to a question about outcomes of migration, of what the diaspora has meant for women living in Mayfair.

Gender Equality and Neo-liberal Governmentality in Refugee Camps

ELISABETH OLIVIUS

ABSTRACT

In recent decades, humanitarian aid to refugees has increasingly employed neo-liberal forms of governing that are characterized by an emphasis on accountability, measurement of performance, and the decentralization of responsibility for welfare. This paper examines the implications of the neo-liberalization of the international refugee regime for humanitarian aspirations to promote gender equality, and argues that neo-liberal strategies and practices of government fundamentally shape the meaning of gender equality and the organization of its promotion in humanitarian aid to refugees. The analysis draws on a Foucauldian governmentality perspective, and, based on interviews with humanitarian workers, shows how neo-liberal technologies of government are employed in gender equality programmes in refugee camps in Thailand and Bangladesh. The paper concludes that neo-liberal forms of gender equality promotion have a number of problematic effects: the meaning of gender equality becomes superficial and instrumental, and international "expertise" is privileged at the expense of refugee ownership when gender equality is constructed as a technical, administrative issue rather than an issue of power and politics.

Introduction

The end of the Cold War and the rise of neo-liberalism in western states have fundamentally altered the conditions for international refugee policy and practice in recent decades. Neo-liberal policies and the absence of Cold War rivalries have made states in Europe and North America increasingly unwilling to accept refugees from the global South. Moreover, the focus of the international refugee regime has shifted from asylum to assistance of refugees in the global south, return of refugees, and prevention of refugee flows.[1] Further, donor demands for financial accountability and the evaluation of humanitarian performance have led to the adoption of neo-liberal strategies for the management of humanitarian aid, mirroring the policies within many donor states.[2] In humanitarian aid to refugees, a neo-liberal emphasis on accountability,

Elisabeth Olivius, "Gender Equality and Neo-liberal Governmentality in Refugee Camps," *St Antony's International Review* 9, no. 1 (2013): 53-69.